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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3463  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1973  
RUEWMFD/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN PARLIAMENT APPROVES ELECTORAL CODE OF  
CONDUCT

REF: ADDIS ABABA 2624

¶1. (U) On December 22, the Ethiopian Parliament passed a new electoral code of conduct into law, following more than three months of negotiations between the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and opposition political parties, and a further two months of review in Parliament. No substantive changes were made to the code of conduct during review and drafting of implementing legislation by the Legal and Administrative Affairs Standing Committee and the full House of Peoples' Representatives. During parliamentary debate, several Members of Parliament from the opposition Ethiopian Federalist Democratic Unity Forum (Forum, formerly Forum for Democratic Dialogue) objected to the bill on the basis that it contravened the constitutional mandate of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), and was therefore unconstitutional.

¶2. (SBU) To date, 65 political parties have signed the code of conduct. The Forum has not signed the code of conduct, and according to Oromo People's Congress (OPC) Chairman Merera Gudena will not sign unless the EPRDF agrees to hold bilateral discussions with the Forum. During parliamentary discussion EPRDF whip Hailemariam Desalegne stated that political parties that do not sign the code of conduct will not be permitted to present complaints to the joint electoral council of political parties established by the new law, according to opposition Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) party chairman Bulcha Demeksa and Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) executive committee member Temesgen Zewdie. In a public statement, Hailemariam said the law allows all opposition political parties to participate in resolving problems arising from the election process.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The EPRDF whip's comments during presentation of the bill roughly correspond to presidential signing statements in the U.S. in that they indicate how the government may enforce the legislation. If the government holds all political parties to the now legally binding code of conduct, but does not allow parties who have not signed it to benefit from the investigative and arbitration procedures it establishes, non-signatory parties will surely cry foul. The Forum continues to maintain that it will not sign the code of conduct unless the EPRDF agrees to hold bilateral discussions, and it is highly unlikely the EPRDF will agree to this, having refused to do so for over five months. End comment.  
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